

Testimony of William Stillinger
concerning HB 5785 (RAISED)- An Act Concerning Solar Panel Rebates
March 5, 2008

Co-chairs Fonfara and Fontana and other members of the Energy Technology Committee, greetings:

I am William Stillinger, general manager of PV Squared, a renewable energy installation company located in New Britain. PV Squared provides turnkey photovoltaic, solar hot water, small wind and hydroelectric energy systems for homes, businesses, municipalities, and institutions. It is my testimony that HB 5785 (RAISED) should NOT be enacted.

My business (PV Squared) became active in Connecticut for reasons entirely attributable to the existence of the ratepayer fund you established as part of the utility restructuring legislation passed several years ago. We became a qualified installer under the Clean Energy Fund's residential solar program, opened an office in New Britain and brought several new employees into our operation. Since that time, we along with the other parties engaged in the installation and inspection of PV systems eligible for a rebate - including the electrical inspectors in our CT towns, CL&P and UI engineers, and the Clean Energy Fund's inspectors and program administrators - have learned a great deal from our collective experiences. Today, the CCEF's residential solar program enjoys a positive national reputation within the solar industry for its efficacy in implementing public energy policy.

Although it's not perfect, this program deserves to continue in its present form - unaltered by the changes envisioned in HB5785 - because it operates under a clear set of rules and standards that ensure that installed systems are done professionally and with uniform quality. Further, the "paperwork" transactions between the installer and the CCEF are nearly all done electronically which ensures that rebate applications are dealt with quickly and equitably. Today there are 23 qualified installers active in this program, and I can assure you that competition for specific jobs in this field is strong and healthy. My objection to this bill does not arise because I want to keep other installers from entering the CT market, but from concerns over degradation of the program's integrity and the emerging solar industry's reputation.

HB5785 would disrupt the current process, which by any meaningful measure is working well. It would make a homeowner's PV system eligible for the solar rebate even if not installed by a qualified installer, subject to the system's approval by the Renewable Energy Investment Fund's board. At best, this would embroil the board or its designee in a massive ratepayer-financed, expensive and unnecessary effort to undertake those certifications. At worst, it would bring down the existing program by multiplying the red tape and eroding installation standards.

How much easier and more efficient it is to keep the current system going, with the CCEF continuing to qualify additional installers to become eligible to obtain rebates for their customers. That stimulates the market and keeps the program free of abusive practices.

Thank you for your time and attention.